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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8148
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 5865
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 3745
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 2237
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 6956
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0883
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4322
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 0549
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 6692

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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Lebanon, Syria/Austria (4/5)

11. Summary: Syrian papers reported a statement by President Emile Lahoud that his country seeks to maintain best relations with Syria, "because this is a permanent option for the interest of Lebanon in light of the fraternal Syrian-Lebanese relations." Papers also reported President Lahoud's meeting with Ammar Moussawi and Mohammad Berjaoui, two leaders in Hizbollah, who discussed attempts by some Lebanese parties to target and weaken the Lebanese national resistance.

Syrian papers reported statements of the Austrian Ambassador in Damascus, Karel Schrmek, underlining Syria's important role and position in the region, particularly for Europe. At a celebration attended by Syria's Grand Mufti and EU ambassadors in Syria, Schrmek, whose country currently heads the EU, stressed the need to boost ties between Syria and Europe and to work hard to expand the culture of tolerance, amity and peace and prevent any kind of extremism.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Foreign Minister al-Muallem briefs the cabinet on latest regional and international developments. Muallem: President Asad's participation in the recent Arab Summit in Khartoum helped reach positive resolutions" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/5)

"A US Study: Israeli lobby is behind the targeting of Syria" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/5)

"An Austrian call to enhance cooperation between Syria and the EU. Schrmek, Austrian Ambassador in Damascus, Highlights Syria's role in spreading the culture of peace and love" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/5)

"A Lebanese determination to make the national dialogue a success, giving priority to citizens' issues. President Lahoud: Lebanon's interest lies in establishing best relations with Syria. Lebanese politicians call for government attention to the daily life of Lebanese citizens, reject American tutelage, stress commitment to national resistance, and assert that foreign interference serves Israel" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/5)

"Two Palestinians killed in Gaza. Israeli forces target headquarters of the Palestinian Presidency in Gaza. Palestinian Foreign Minister Zahar tours a number of Eastern Asian countries" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/5)

"US President Bush calls for accelerating the formation of the Iraqi government" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/5)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Al-Saniora and His Visit to Damascus"

The Chief Editor of Al-Iqtissadya, an independent weekly, editorialized (4/2): "What does Al-Saniora's handshake with President Asad at the Khartoum Summit mean? Did Al-Saniora want to express to the Arab leaders his good intention towards Syria and towards Syrian-Lebanese relations...?"

"We believe that distinguished Syrian-Lebanese relations should be based on mutual respect and demarcation of borders.... Mutual respect means, first, the accountability of all those who contributed to the hysterical campaign to distort Syria's image and deliberately accused Syrian of assassinating Rafik Al-Hariri and presented false witnesses to the IIC and urged the UNSC resolution to punish Syria for a crime it did not commit.

"The good intention that Al-Saniora marketed at the Khartoum summit, and might market soon in Damascus, means that the international investigation must not be restricted to Lebanese victims; it must include investigation of the assassination of Syrian labors in Lebanon. There should no distinction between Syrian and Lebanese victims....

"Al-Saniora might come to Damascus tomorrow to discuss demarcation of the border, opening embassies and opening a new page in bilateral relations. But Al-Saniora will not enjoy popular Syrian support because he has not brought the criminals who assassinated bilateral relations to court....The Syrian people will not forget the blood of Syrian laborers in Lebanon....

"Al-Saniora has not been neutral for a single day. In addition to his position as Prime Minister, he is an employee of Saad Al-Hariri, who is trying to use his wealth to prove the impossible, namely, that Syria is responsible for his father's assassination....

"Our message to Al-Saniora is that he should not hide in the alleys but must appear boldly in public. Lebanon can mend what the merchants of war and blood have spoiled.... The chance still exists for accountability of those who sabotaged bilateral relations...."

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